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ABSTRACT

This study examined the interactions between a school board and school district leadership and the community it served. The case study focused on the choices made by the board and central administration when conferring with the community. The study examined a southern Ohio school district with approximately 5,700 students enrolled in K-12. It built upon and raised questions about the limits of Dissatisfaction Theory as it described a cycle of rising community concern, school board response, and increased community conflict. The research was structured as a qualitative case analysis using grounded-theory techniques by which the observations were examined to identify patterns and conclusions in the data. Data consisted of leadership interviews with the members of the board of education, the superintendent, a principal, members of a group in conflict with the board, and observations of the school board in public meetings. The results indicated a cycle of growing conflict fueled by rising discontent in the community, failed communication strategies, and increasing defensive posturing. Although Dissatisfaction Theory did not explain the emergence of initial dissatisfaction, school boards must nevertheless respond to early expressions of dissatisfaction. (RJM)

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Community Relations and Communication in the Cardinal School District

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The purpose of this study was to examine the interactions between a school board and school district leadership and the community that it serves. Of primary interest is the choices made by the board and central administration when interacting with the community and the tenor and feel of the communication. The goal of this case was to examine the patterns of interaction and the emerging conflict in the community over school issues. This study builds upon and raises questions about the limits of Dissatisfaction Theory while describing a cycle of rising community concern, school board response, and increased community conflict.

I. Dissatisfaction Theory and Related Research

Laurence Iannacconne and Frank Lutz articulated Dissatisfaction Theory as applied to school district conflict in 1970 based on ethnographic research in the Robertsdale School District. That study described a rise in discontent with the public schools and resulting turnover in the school board and subsequently the superintendency. (Iannacconne and Lutz, 1970, 1986) Based on that research a model was proposed that has essentially been used in research as originally articulated. The model describes a scenario where a community and school board are in relative alignment with regard to their "values and aspirations". (Lutz and Iannacconne, 1986) Theorizing how situations like that in Robertsdale occur, the authors suggest that over time the community changes, jobs leave, and new industry enters causing the values and aspiration of the community to change. School boards however are slower to change based in Lutz and Iannacconne's reasoning on Michels' Iron Law of Oligarchy (1966), resisting attempts to influence it and closed to new ideas and values. Frustrated with the conservatism of their school board the community grows increasingly dissatisfied with them and eventually, suggests the model, they will replace the board in elections and that change in turn is likely to result in either the voluntary or involuntary turnover in the superintendency. This is a cyclical model that should re-occur in communities although some may see the evidence of it more often than others.

Research using the theory since its articulation has been primarily of a couple of types. Several quantitative studies have examined whether or not there is a significant relationship between school board member turnover and superintendent change. Overwhelmingly these studies do verify this claim in the theory. (See Lutz and Iannacconne, 1986 and Krise, 1994 for examples.) Another group of studies has sought to build indicators that will serve as predictors of board and superintendent turnover. These have met with limited success but the indicators have questionable applicability. (Hosman, 1989) Finally, relevant to schools, there have been a limited number of additional qualitative and/or case study approaches that use Dissatisfaction Theory to explain events. Several, the most notable being the Scottsdale Arizona case (Weninger and Stout, 1989), have verified the explanatory and interpretive power offered by the theory. However, at least on case study (Disanti, 1988) and some of the more recent quantitative studies (Hosman, 1989; Brackett, 1995) have started to raise questions about the usefulness of the theory given the small amount of variance it accounts for in regression analyses, and the existence of cases that appear to operate more on a continuous cycle of conflict than on a cyclical one.

II. Context

The Cardinal School District* is a suburban school district in Southern Ohio with approximately 5700 students enrolled in Kindergarten through 12th grades. Just under 5% of the student population is minority and/or on Aid to Dependent Children (ADC). Average family incomes are high, above $35,000. The students perform exceptionally on standardized tests and over 75% of graduates pursue post secondary education. The school district includes both the City of Cardinal and a surrounding un-incorporated township. The area has experienced significant growth in the past ten years as housing and retail development has increased.

* The names of the school district, community, and other identifying details have been changed to ensure the anonymity of the informants.

Historically, the district is very conservative politically and anti-government and anti-tax. The school district regularly has to try three and four times to pass tax issues. The Christian Coalition has recently been involved in challenges to access to certain items at the public library.

The district is led by a five member elected school board on four-year terms on split cycles (three on one cycle, two on the other). At the time of this study the board was comprised of four white males and one white female all in their late forties to early sixties. The superintendent is a white male in his sixties and has been in that job for eight years. Prior to serving as superintendent he had served as business manger in the district for 16 years.

In calendar year 1996 the school board began to examine possibilities for additional revenue. The limits to growth in revenue in the State of Ohio and moderate growth in district enrollment meant that by the next school year the district would have to cut budget items to submit a balanced budget as required by law. The board decided in May of 1996 to ask the community to approve a 1% income tax as an alternative to increased property taxes. That issue lost by more than two to one. In August the board had asked for a property tax increase that was defeated with close to 60% no vote. After the failure in August, cuts in services were made before the opening of school that impacted students across the system and extracurricular activities. In November, the community again failed to approve a property tax increase that would have restored cuts to the budget. The no vote was about 54%. It was during the fall campaign that I began observing school board meetings. Interviews were conducted primarily in February of 1997 as the board was trying to decide how to put another tax issue on for the May election so that it would pass. In the midst of the fallout from the failed November campaign a group of citizens organized to conduct a review of the district and make recommendations; which ultimately led to placing another tax issue before the voters in May of 1997.

III. Methodology

This research was structured as a qualitative case analysis using grounded theory techniques by which the observations were examined to identify patterns and conclusions in the data. I have used a combination of comprehensive selection and quota selection to identify key informants. Comprehensive selection has been used in the inclusion of all of the school board members as informants. In doing this I am assured of capturing the full range of views and the commonalties among the board. Quota selection best defines the approach to selecting a small number of the active members of the opposition to include representative voices of the larger opposition voice in the community. Finally, the overall choice of Cardinal as the case to be studied should be considered a typical case selection. While the intensity of some of the political conflict in this community may be atypical, the issues and approaches used have more in common with issues and strategies in other communities than they do not.

I negotiated entree through my personal relationships with key leaders in the district. A principal who served as the district's spokesman during the November campaign is someone who I have worked with professionally and he provided assistance in making contact in the district. I also have a personal friend who has a long history of living and working in this district and who is a personal friend of the school board president. These contacts enabled me to reach the key informants so that I could schedule interviews. To reach a group of parents who have been in conflict with the school board I was put in contact with the head of an opposition group through the school district leadership. After conversations with the opposition group director, I organized a focus group with six active members of the group.

My data consists of leadership interviews with the members of the board of education, the superintendent, and a principal who served as spokesman for the November campaign; notes from a focus group with members of the opposition group; and observations of the school board in public monthly meetings. Interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. The focus group with the

opposition group was captured in notes after the session after participants refused permission to tape the session. The school board meetings are open forums, which I have observed some in person and some on video tape, recording field notes.

Together the data enable triangulation in a couple of ways. First, I am able to cross check individual board member statements in the content of other leadership interviews. Second, statements made and conclusions drawn from interviews are corroborated with observations of the board meetings. Third, the perceptions and opinions of the opposition group serve as both a check on the statements of others but can also be checked based on board meetings and leadership interviews. Finally, in some cases I have used newspaper articles and letters to the editor as another source to verify opinions and conclusions drawn.

Open coding procedures as outlined in Strauss and Corbin (1990) were conducted on a subset of interview transcripts and board meeting field notes. The coding terms from that open coding were organized into like categories, which generated a list of data codes with 13 main coding categories and six sub-categories. In addition to codes generated from the open coding, four of the thirteen codes were identified based on Dissatisfaction Theory. The list of data codes is attached in the appendix. Finally the codes were organized into a pattern that reflected the interplay among the data which led to the framework described below.

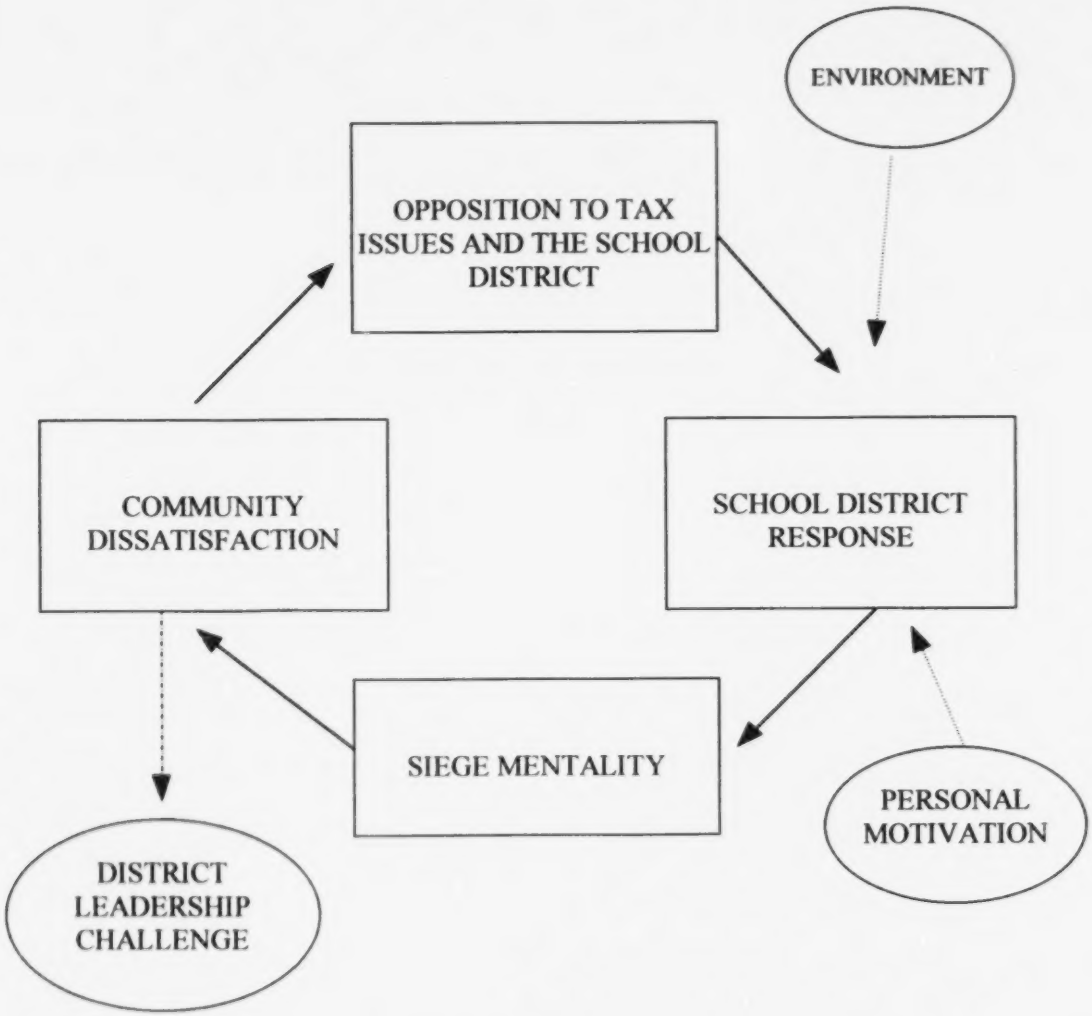

Figure 1

IV. Pattern of Conflict

The illustration in Figure 1 shows the pattern of conflict that operated in the Cardinal School District during the period of this study. As community dissatisfaction with the decisions being made by the school board grew, questions were raised and concerns expressed. This growing

dissatisfaction led to organized opposition to three different school operating tax issues. The school district responded to the dissatisfaction and opposition and was influenced by the larger environment of education in the state and region and by the personal histories of the board members and superintendent. The nature of these responses from a defensive attitude tended to belittle the opposition, which combined to produce a "siege mentality" in the district with charges and counter-charges going back and forth. The overall effect is an escalating conflict as those dissatisfied with the school district became more dissatisfied, increase their opposition, forcing the district to be more defensive in response which in turn further separates the community. Finally, Dissatisfaction Theory predicts that the escalating cycle of conflict will be broken when there is a change in school board membership and/or the superintendency.

Community Dissatisfaction

The growing dissatisfaction in the Cardinal School District is evidenced in a number of ways. There are both underlying changes in the demographics of the community and a vocal set of voices reflecting frustration with the district leadership.

Shifting demographics were recognized by the board president: "When I moved here over 50% of the people living in the community used the system [the public schools], now we have about 30%." Growth is also a factor illustrated in the September board meeting when in response to questions about student enrollments it was commented that the enrollment at one of the oldest buildings in the district was at its highest ever. Related to this is the fact that the district has experienced a transition from a small rural town to a bedroom suburb for the nearby city. The growth in the district has been primarily in township (un-incorporated) neighborhoods not in the old city, and there are conflicts between the older Cardinal residents and the new township residents.

An additional complexity in the kind of change going on in the community is explained by the superintendent when near the end of our interview the following exchange occurred:

Supt.: Have you dealt with the Christian Coalition in any way?

Int.: I have in the past. Is it part of the equation here?

Supt.: I didn't mention it.

Int.: Okay. I understand.

Supt.: They are very active in this county, let me put it that way. You don't see them. They bragged about distributing some 40,000 pieces of literature prior to the election. But I can't come out and say its the Christian Coalition, how could I prove it.

While there is no other evidence in my data that the Christian Coalition is active in the school elections, they have been involved in some controversies over holdings at the public library. What it serves as for this research is an example of the emergence of a point of view in local politics that has only recently become important. It is also a view that educators elsewhere have had difficulty with.

Ongoing community dissatisfaction is described in a number of ways. The principal who served as levy campaign spokesman said, "I think there is a large contingent in this area of anti-tax people" and after the November tax issue defeat, "this was the twelfth out of 14 school issues that were defeated here in Cardinal." His analysis of a strong anti-tax voice in the community describes one of the key sources of dissatisfaction with the schools. The first issue that the school board placed on the ballot in this cycle of voting was a one percent earnings tax that actually enlarged the number of anti-tax voters because of the significant burden it would have placed on people. Two of the active members of the opposition group described their reason for beginning to ask questions and challenge district decisions was the impact that the earnings tax would have had on them. This decision was also recognized by board members and the superintendent as a disaster that carried negative feelings over to the later elections.

Other examples of community dissatisfaction appeared at school board meetings. At the September meeting just after the school year had begun with dramatic cuts in bus transportation, a parent got up to make a comment. Visibly upset, she asked why if busses were cut for school, she

saw a bus full of kids over in another district. She challenged the board as to why the kids on an activity get special attention and her kids can't get to school. Before the board responded, a large number of the 200 people in the audience applauded, even though this same audience had earlier expressed strong support for the district. This suggests that the level of dissatisfaction with the district was strong even among its supporters.

These are signs of underlying dissatisfaction with the decisions made by the district leadership and of community change. That dissatisfaction and the inability of the district leadership to respond to the changed community was fuel for the growing conflict in the community.

Opposition to Tax Issues and the School District

The evidence of opposition to the schools is self-evident in the huge defeat of three tax issues the first with 69% no votes, the second with 60%, and the third with 54%. But is this opposition just simply people opposed to higher taxes or is it a reflection of opposition to the district and its leadership?

Responses from the focus group with the six members of the opposition support the answer that there is much more to it than just anti-tax. They describe the district leadership as "out of touch with the community", that they aren't "competent", and they lie or don't know the answers when giving questions. The opposition went as far as to petition for the removal of the superintendent at the September board meeting.

The opposition to the district has played out strongly in the local paper. Every one of the board members described as a serious source of problems the fact that the paper seemed to be against them. They shared several examples of times when the paper printed something and wouldn't allow a response. For example in the interview with the board president,

> "One of the things that hurt us a lot and I don't think I will ever get over this, was there was a total of nine rebuttals that I wrote and about a dozen that one of the other members wrote that I know of personally that were sent in, in response to articles that were negative, that were never printed. I hold the newspaper accountable for that. They definitely slanted the community because they didn't print the truth. They printed the sensationalistic view, hey we are going to save you money. Then we would send in the rebuttal that says no, that is

> not how it works, here is what really happened, here is what the budget says, this is what the results are.... and they wouldn't put it in. I asked how can you do this, how can you rip this community apart by not printing what the truth is. This is public record, this isn't something that is doctored or is conjured up or I sat in my living room and made the numbers come out this way."

The content of much of the debate in the Cardinal community was over previous decisions to spend money and accusations of money mismanagement by the current district leadership. As the principal described, "[The opposition] took the stance that money was being spent in ways which they didn't agree with. They did whatever they could to make us look as though we don't need the money and we're coming back to the people again." At the September board meeting several minutes were devoted to one of the board members trying to explain the way a bus garage recently built was paid for without ever being part of a ballot issue.

Much of this mistrust and questioning is a result of the board's communication strategies, as the discussion in the next section will illustrate. However, the fact remains that a large number of the community had come to believe that the district leadership was not to be trusted. As several of the interview subjects said, the district had a serious credibility problem.

District Responses

Four different characteristics make up the school board's communication strategies during the levy campaigns and in responses to the opposition's concerns: 1) a tendency to "preach to the choir", 2) primarily information filled, 3) generally one directional, and 4) using threats to motivate. The combination of these factors create a voice of the school district which fails to recognize the concerns of the dissatisfied and in turn produces a heightened level of tension and conflict.

1. The tendency to preach to the choir was recognized by most of the district leadership. The principal serving as spokesman: "In many cases, as I look back in retrospect, we were kind of preaching to the choir a bit." The school board president: "We have done a lot of town type things that I felt were not as beneficial as they should have been and the reason was the people that

showed up to these were the people that are always in the system anyway." And another board member in response to a question:

> Int.: Would it be fair to say that some of what happened is that you were seeing the same people, the core group of people?
> BM: Definitely. You would only see the no voters at the polls. We couldn't pull them in.

Additionally, at school board meetings the audience was almost always entirely supporters. At the September board meeting when the request for the superintendent's resignation and discussion of the cut in busing were both on the agenda, 28 citizens rose to make public comments, (there were over 150 people in attendance), between 9:00 p.m. and 10:30 p.m. Of those 28 only two were clearly non-supportive, one of whom was the head of the opposition group, and a third asked questions. The other 25 all stated unambiguous support for the district. This was the normal pattern for school board meetings, which were basically another example of "preaching to the choir".

2. The information-based nature of the communication was evident in the choices made at school board meetings and in many of the school board responses to newspaper stories or letters to the editor. The best example of this was at the October board meeting right before the November vote when two of the three speakers presented fact after fact with overheads about the spending in the district, the enrollment of the district, the district's numbers in comparison with other districts, the development of curriculum, the awards won by students, etc. This reflected a strategy that believed that by giving out enough information the community would support the schools.

3. The problem reflected in the information sharing strategy and the threats approach discussed below is that the strategies were based on a definition of communication that include transferring information only one direction. In interview after interview with district leadership I was struck by the implied definitions of communication as only being school district delivery of message to voter. There was never any sense of the district having some responsibility for listening to the community and/or the opposition. One board member's response when asked about the

communication strategies used and what might be improved said: "You can bring a horse to water but you can't force it to drink." The principal/spokesman said: "Communication is a two way street. You can put out as much information, but you got to get people to read it. Are people willing to come and attend meetings to listen. That is the real problem." The superintendent, "when you communicate, people feel you are communicating when you tell them what they want to hear." And finally another board member, "If you are truly interested in what is going on in your schools, then it is your responsibility I believe, that most of the responsibility rests on your shoulders to find out what it is you want to know."

This same approach is reflected in how the board structures meetings and public interaction with the board. On two occasions I observed, the board was interested in answering questions and trying to deal with issues in the community. Their approach to doing this was to have the citizens present at a board meeting write down questions they had on index cards which a panel from the League of Women Voters would then screen to ensure they were appropriate and not duplicative. A moderator would then read questions with a limited amount of time for board response. As I observed it there were a wide variety of questions posed and the time limit was rarely enforced on responses to questions. The effect this had was to disconnect questioner from the question and to those already distrustful of the board it just served to convince them that the board would screen out the tough questions and not deal with them. As part of one way communication this strategy effectively eliminated any follow-up and confirmation that the genuine concern of the questioner had been addressed.

4. The final factor in the district's communication and response strategy was to use threats to motivate people to see why they needed to vote for tax issues. The focus group with active members of the opposition group reflected this clearly when one member listed the types of threats used by the board: "real estate values will go down if you vote no, teachers and administrators are leaving the district, we won't be able to hire new teachers". At the September board meeting a

presentation to the community by the levy campaign committee clearly stated these very threats. Again at the November board meeting there were threats about what would be cut if the levy failed ranging from extracurriculars, to more busing, to course offerings, to layoffs of teachers.

In addition to these apparent characteristics of the district communication strategies, the board members all reflect strong personal motivation and a similar interpretation of the larger operating context that both seem to influence the content and nature of the communication.

The board president summed up the sense of personal motivation shared equally by each board member when he said, "As a board member our first obligation is not to the voters, it is to the students, our second obligation is to the voters." The impact of this view on the communication strategies was that it gave the board members reason to disagree with citizens. In fact in some cases it almost seemed as if some board members enjoyed the conflict because it gave them the chance to remind everyone that they are doing what is in the best interests of the kids. While this motivation is admirable and probably appropriate for board members to have, it may cause board members to characterize those in disagreement as not concerned about kids and thereby shift the argument to a more volatile moral level.

The larger operating context of the school district regularly discussed at board meetings and mentioned by all of the key informants was the problem they faced because of the limits to growth put on property taxes by the state. In the district's view the reality is that they have to keep asking for more money because the larger system requires it just to keep even. While in many ways this too is factually true and needed to be shared, it also provides an easy answer for why the board has to keep asking for money without the board having to take more responsibility for the decisions made as a district. This disconnection from responsibility, by arguing that the forces beyond their control create the need for tax increases, causes the district to fail to fully listen to and respond to concerns in the district. To the district leaders the need seems self-evident and simple so challenges to the requests seem illogical and must be based on an illegitimate concern.

Together all of these factors describe an approach to communication that fails to recognize and deal with the concerns and issues of those dissatisfied with the schools. An exchange at the October board meeting captures the problem well. One of the members of the opposition group rose and stated that they had been told by the superintendent that there was no additional spending in one area during the current year and that the numbers indicated that there was a 20% increase. He finished his comments with, "So either the superintendent lied to us, or he doesn't know what he is talking about. Which is it?" The ensuing responses were all around what numbers he was looking at and included some berating of the speaker about how "they [the opposition] don't know what they are talking about" and "they can't put a budget together". But no one ever addressed, and the speaker failed to press on, the core of the question which wasn't about numbers but was about the competence and credibility of the superintendent and by implication the school board. The failure of the board to *listen* and respond to the expressed concerns in this example and in most of their communication efforts, exacerbated the divide growing in the community.

Siege Mentality

The first indication of the emergence of a siege mentality in the data is in the words used to describe the nature of the relationship between the schools and the community. Terms like antagonistic, strained, adversarial, distrusting, and animosity, are all used to describe the school board/community relationship. Some express more balance with a longer view suggesting that for some the relationship is great, especially when the schools aren't on the ballot, while for others it is problematic.

Additional descriptions of the current state of affairs show strongly the emergence of a "circle the wagons" - siege mentality.

> The board president: "We are in the trenches with this thing right now. We are taking a lot of heat."
>
> The superintendent: "The perspective is that the opposition, the board, and myself are at real logger heads, really battling."

The principal/spokesman: "We are licking our wounds right now."

Another board member: "We fought a civil war in August and in November".

These characterizations are reinforced by the personal emotions being expressed by board members such as anger, frustration, and disappointment. One member summed it up well describing what the past year had been like as a board member saying, "It is hell." The opposition group reflected similar feelings including anger, resentment, and disappointment especially at the way they and others get "berated and belittled" when they raised concerns.

The evidence of a perspective of defensiveness is captured in a quote from the board president about what is happening in the district between the third failed issue and the coming fourth. Sounding angry, he suggests that some suffering is good right now:

> So we have drawn a truce in the media of not beating each other up. Some of the people say well that gives the community a chance to heal, well as far as I am concerned they need not heal until they fix the problem that is the students don't have busing, the students don't have this, the students don't have that, the teachers don't have a contract, the teachers don't have a raise. There are all kinds of things. I think you need to bleed a little bit here and understand what pains it is to go through and then remember that two and three and five years from now.

So the development of the siege mentality puts both the school district and the opposition into defensive and counter-attack positions that just serve to increase the distrust and dissatisfaction between each other. As the interplay continues the conflict gets more and more intense making it more difficult to resolve disagreements and ensuring that it will take longer and longer for the rifts created to be bridged.

Dissatisfaction Theory

Given this state of conflict and expressed dissatisfaction with the schools, Dissatisfaction Theory would predict that a turnover in the school board and the superintendency are not far away. The data support this likelihood. One attempt was already made before the November election to force the superintendent to resign. That attempt was rebuffed and the superintendent actually signed a new three-year contract a couple of months later.

However, the opposition is still clearly interested in changing the district's Leadership and said, "our goal is to get all three seats (up for re-election November 1997) even though our best chance is only for one or two." The longest standing and only female board member, who is in one of the two seats not up for re-election said, "The casualty of this whole process, I am sorry to say, is probably going to be the election come fall. Because we have three board members up, I don't even know if these guys are going to run. I don't think they are going to run, and if that happens it will be a shame." The combination of the likelihood that some or all of the three members up will not run and the oppositions stated intent to win board seats seems to make board turnover almost a certainty.

An Update on the Story

Since the completion of data collection in early March, a school tax issue was approved in the Cardinal School District in May with a 54% yes vote. This result was the product of an unprecedented campaign by some key local businesses and the involvement of the former head of the opposition on a committee to review the school board's finances and make recommendations. While this turn of events suggests some improvement in the situation in Cardinal and perhaps some adjustment in the dissatisfaction level, the support generated for the tax levy was still very much in a threat mode and depended on frustrated people wanting to get the tax issues behind them. In the November board election the three members up for re-election chose not to run. Three new school board members were elected. It is not yet clear the how their attitudes and positions differ from their predecessors. The superintendent remains under contract and no strong movement has emerged to remove him sooner than the end of his contract in the year 2000.

V. Conclusion

Told in this study of the Cardinal School District, is a story of a cycle of growing conflict that is fueled by rising discontent in the community, failed communication strategies, and

increasing defensive posturing. Starting with a tax issue in the spring of 1996 the school district found itself dealing with increased questions and concerns about the direction of the school district. These new concerns were partially uncovered by the board's decision to try and pass an income tax in a community in which it would hit particularly hard on top of already existing earnings taxes. As the board failed to listen and respond in meaningful ways to the concerns expressed by the growing opposition, the opposition became more obstinate, aggressive, and less trusting of the district leadership. By the end of the data collection phase of this study the level of conflict was now described with war like metaphors, from calling it a "civil war" to "licking our wounds", to "calling a truce" and "waving a white flag".

What can we learn from this study? School districts must learn to respond in a different way to early expressions of dissatisfaction. The story here, not uncommon in Ohio and across the country, is one of intransigence by a board. The Cardinal School Board has three members who got elected arguing for increased communication between the board and the community. Yet when it came time for them to communicate with a dissatisfied group of citizens they failed to recognize and address the core concerns. Instead the rules of the local politics quickly created a defensive posturing and the cycle of conflict began. The strong sense of purpose that board members bring to their jobs in combination with the surrounding environment that insulates them from more comprehensive understandings of the issues causes them to misunderstand challenges, viewing them as overwhelmingly anti-kid and anti-school. While certainly some of the dissatisfaction is these things, much of it is not. The problem is board members believe they are genuine stewards of the community's children and they do not respond well to suggestions that there may be alternative ways of dealing with the students and organizing the spending of dollars for the students, than those that they decide upon.

Finally, I am concerned about the implications of the seeming routine emergence of conflict in school districts, on our society's ongoing commitment to public education. David Mathews

(1996) and others have raised the possibility that public education as an institution faces a crisis of legitimacy. Perhaps these conflicts serve to undermine over time the larger public's support for an institution that brings everyone together for education. Especially in communities where this conflict emerges more often, we need to understand better how that divorces the average voter, uninvolved in the conflict, from any sense of ownership of the public schools.

VI. What Next

First in the further research on Dissatisfaction Theory, while this study has used it as a framework and in some ways validated its premise, the theory has not helped explain and predict the emergence of initial dissatisfaction in a community. As the authors of the theory have themselves written (Lutz and Iannacconne, 1986), for the theory to be of help in preventing the community conflict it explains, it needs to provide better indicators of the emerging dissatisfaction. Perhaps this theory will accommodate such explanations or perhaps we will need to draw a different theory that captures the earlier stages.

Second, Dissatisfaction Theory operates on a cyclical model, (Lutz and Iannacconne, 1986) but Disanti (1988) has raised the issue that there may be district in which a constant state of conflict is a more accurate description. This may very well be the case in many districts, including Cardinal which has a history of intense conflict every three or four years to pass school ballot issues.

One additional area for further research is in the area of the mental models used by school leaders. Whether called "mental models", "cognitive maps", "schema" or otherwise, it is clear that the district leadership in Cardinal shared some common assumptions about how political communication should take place. Their assumptions did not include any consideration of listening and/or engaging in any dialogue with the public. This mental model caused them to make certain conclusions and decisions about action that may actually have exacerbated the conflict in Cardinal. Where do the mental models held by school leaders come from? Were these models learned in the

larger community? Were they learned after becoming school board members as part of being enculturated into the system? Further research into this issue that connects the work in cognitive psychology and organization theory may provide insight into the fundamental assumption that will have to be addressed if conflict among schools and communities can be better addressed.

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Appendix

Cardinal School District
Data Codes

BORC - **Board Opinion of Relationship and/or Community**
characterizations by the school district leadership of the nature of the relationship between the school district and the community and/or of just the community.

BIA - **Board Interpretation of Actions**
interpretations by school district leadership of actions taken by them, the community, or the opposition.

OORC - **Opposition Opinion of Relationship and/or Community**
characterizations by the opposition of the nature of the relationship between the school district and the community and/or of just the community.

OIA - **Opposition Interpretation of Actions**
interpretations by opposition of actions taken by them, the community, or the school district.

CS-B - **Communication Strategies - Board of Education**
strategies used by the district leadership for communication with the community.

- **-UDC** **-Unidirectional Communication**
  communication strategies used by the district that are primarily one-way in nature.
- **-A** **-Attitude**
  attitude of the district towards community communication.
- **-T** **-Threats**
  communication by the board containing specific or implied threats.
- **-I** **-Informational**
  board communication that is primarily factual information.

CS-O - **Communication Strategies - Opposition**
communication strategies used by the opposition group to reach the community.

- **-OR** **- Opposition Requests**
  specific requests made by the opposition of the school district.

CC - **Community Change**
indications of the changing nature of the CSD population.

CD - **Community Dissatisfaction**
indications of portions of the community being dissatisfied with the CSD leadership.

SM - **Siege Mentality**
indications of defensive and/or reactionary responses by CSD leadership.

- **-CO** **-Characterizations of Opposition**
  CSD leadership opinions about the opposition and/or their behavior.

BES - **Board Electoral Status**
details about the status of terms for board members and opinions about possible board turnover.

SS - **Superintendent Status**
details about the future status of employment for the superintendent.

PM - **Personal Motivation/Mission/Purpose**
expressions of personal motivation or purpose by CSD leadership.

TR - **Teachers' Role**
expressions regarding the role teachers played in the levy campaigns and their current morale level